

American

NEWS & VIEWS

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Proclamation by President Obama on Thanksgiving Day 2010	1
U.S. Condemns “Outrageous” North Korean Attack.....	1
Secretary Clinton Honors Ela Bhatt, Leader in Women’s Empowerment	2
U.S. Reaches Pakistan Flood Relief Milestone	3
United States Urges Haitians to Vote in November 28 Election	3
South and Central Asia Students Embrace America’s Thanksgiving	4

Proclamation by President Obama on Thanksgiving Day 2010

THE WHITE HOUSE
Office of the Press Secretary
November 23, 2010

THANKSGIVING DAY, 2010

BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A PROCLAMATION

A beloved American tradition, Thanksgiving Day offers us the opportunity to focus our thoughts on the grace that has been extended to our people and our country. This spirit brought together the newly arrived Pilgrims and the Wampanoag tribe -- who had been living and thriving around Plymouth, Massachusetts for thousands of years -- in an autumn harvest feast centuries ago. This Thanksgiving Day, we reflect on the compassion and contributions of Native Americans, whose skill in agriculture helped the early colonists survive, and whose rich culture continues to add to our Nation's heritage. We also pause our normal pursuits on this day and join in a spirit of fellowship and gratitude for the year's bounties and blessings.

Thanksgiving Day is a time each year, dating back to our founding, when we lay aside the troubles and disagreements of the day and bow our heads in humble recognition of the providence bestowed upon our Nation. Amidst the uncertainty of a fledgling experiment in democracy, President George Washington declared the first Thanksgiving in America, recounting the blessings of tranquility, union, and plenty that shined upon our young country. In the dark days of the Civil War when the fate of our Union was in doubt, President Abraham Lincoln proclaimed a Thanksgiving Day, calling for "the Almighty hand" to heal and restore our Nation.

In confronting the challenges of our day, we must draw strength from the resolve of previous generations who faced their own struggles and take comfort in knowing a brighter day has always dawned on our great land. As we stand at the close of one year and look to the promise of the next, we lift up our hearts in gratitude to God for our many blessings, for one another, and for our Nation. This Thanksgiving Day, we remember that the freedoms and security we enjoy as Americans are protected by the brave men and women of the United States Armed Forces. These patriots are willing to lay down their lives in our defense, and they and their families deserve our profound gratitude for their service and sacrifice.

This harvest season, we are also reminded of those

experiencing the pangs of hunger or the hardship of economic insecurity. Let us return the kindness and generosity we have seen throughout the year by helping our fellow citizens weather the storms of our day.

As Americans gather for the time-honored Thanksgiving Day meal, let us rejoice in the abundance that graces our tables, in the simple gifts that mark our days, in the loved ones who enrich our lives, and in the gifts of a gracious God. Let us recall that our forebears met their challenges with hope and an unfailing spirit, and let us resolve to do the same.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, BARACK OBAMA, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and the laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 25, 2010, as a National Day of Thanksgiving. I encourage all the people of the United States to come together -- whether in our homes, places of worship, community centers, or any place of fellowship for friends and neighbors -- to give thanks for all we have received in the past year, to express appreciation to those whose lives enrich our own, and to share our bounty with others.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-third day of November, in the year of our Lord two thousand ten, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and thirty-fifth.

BARACK OBAMA

U.S. Condemns "Outrageous" North Korean Attack

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — North Korea's artillery attack on a South Korean island is an outrageous act, and the United States is working with other countries in the region to develop a "measured and unified response," U.S. officials said.

Speaking to reporters en route to Kokomo, Indiana, where President Obama made remarks on the U.S. economy, deputy White House press secretary Bill Burton said Obama "is outraged by these actions."

The United States stands "shoulder to shoulder with our ally in South Korea" and is "fully committed to their defense," Burton said November 23.

The White House also issued a statement November 23 that called on North Korea to "halt its belligerent action and to fully abide by the terms of the [1953] Armistice Agreement."

Burton offered condolences to the South Korean victims.

According to press reports, two South Korean marines were killed and 16 marines and three civilians were injured in the attack on Yeonpyeong Island in the Yellow Sea.

"We'll be working with South Korea and the international community in coming days on the best way forward in securing peace and stability in the region," Burton said.

President Obama believes that North Korea needs to live up to its obligations under the armistice that halted the Korean War, as well as its obligations under international law, he said.

"North Korea has a pattern of doing things that are provocative," Burton said. "This is a particularly outrageous act, and we're going to be doing everything that we need to do in order to make sure that we're defending our ally in South Korea and that there's security and stability in the region."

State Department spokesman Mark Toner said North Korea had made "an unprovoked military attack" on South Korean military personnel and civilians.

"I can't say from this spot that it was an act of war, but [it was] clearly an act of belligerence," he told reporters November 23. The United States plans to work with its partners in the six-party process — South Korea, China, Japan and Russia — to take "a measured and unified response."

The attack comes after many recent North Korean provocations through its nuclear and ballistic missile testing, the March attack on the South Korean ship Cheonan, and recent claims to have centrifuges capable of producing enriched uranium that could be used in nuclear weapons.

"We're not going to buy into this reaction or word cycle that North Korea seeks to perpetuate," Toner said. "We're going to be deliberate about our approach to this, and it's going to be a consultative process."

A unified approach is "frankly the best way" to make North Korea's leadership "aware of their isolation," Toner said.

Secretary Clinton Honors Ela Bhatt, Leader in Women's Empowerment

By Howard Cincotta
Special Correspondent

Washington — In a moving ceremony of speeches and films at the Kennedy Center for the Arts in Washington, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton conferred the first Global Fairness Award on Ela Bhatt, who has been

called "one of the most important grass-roots leaders of our time."

Bhatt is the founder of the Self-Employed Women's Association in India (see the SEWA website), a combination trade union and social movement that now has more than 1 million members. Bhatt is also one of The Elders, a group of eminent global leaders who work to support peace building, address major causes of human suffering and promote humanity's shared interests.

The mid-November event was sponsored by the nonprofit Global Fairness Initiative, NBC Universal and the Prince of Wales Foundation. Great Britain's Prince Charles spoke to the gathering in a videotaped message.

In giving Bhatt the Global Fairness Award, Clinton said, "Ela Bhatt has upended the old ways of thinking, and compelled all of us to raise our collective ambitions about what we can do to close the gap between the rich and the poor."

Bhatt exemplifies both courage and entrepreneurship, according to José María Figueres, former president of Costa Rica and chair of the Global Fairness Initiative. Her example, he said, demonstrates that the world can fight and win the two great battles of our time — to end poverty and maintain the environment, including working against climate change.

In her remarks, Bhatt said that it is important to recognize that poverty is not simply an economic phenomenon.

"Where there is poverty, there is injustice. There is exploitation — of the individual, of the community and of the environment," she said. "Poverty is a form of violence; it does not respect human labor, it strips a person of humanity, and it takes away their freedom."

BHATT AND SEWA

Bhatt founded SEWA in 1972, drawing its members from some of the country's poorest and most oppressed communities, including women who were, she said, "vegetable vendors, rag pickers, cart pullers and cigarette rollers."

As an organization of poor, self-employed women, SEWA fights economic exploitation and seeks to expand opportunities for new markets, while remaining committed to an ethic of care for the environment and local, sustainable development.

SEWA also provides its members with a broad range of social services. Bhatt's innovative programs, Clinton said, "make it possible for the very poor to gain access to services that were once the sole purview of the well-off —

like credit, like banking, sick leave and child care.”

Beyond its economic role, SEWA, which has now expanded to Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and South Africa, has been instrumental in providing dignity and empowerment to a generation of women.

“At its most basic level, Ela’s work is about fairness, about giving every person the chance to achieve his or her dreams, to make the most of his or her God-given potential,” Clinton said.

The chief sponsor of the award given to Bhatt, the Global Fairness Initiative (see the GFI website), works in Asia, Africa and Latin America to help the working poor by advocating fair wages, access to markets, and government policies that offer a way to escape the poverty trap.

“Talent is universal,” Clinton said, “but opportunity is not.”

HARMONY AND NATURE

The Kennedy Center event concluded with the premiere of the documentary *Harmony*, which Prince Charles narrated. The film, with segments from India, England and the Americas, is an urgent call for addressing the dual issues of environmental protection and sustainable development through a deeper understanding of the natural world.

Harmony was later broadcast on the NBC television network as part of NBC’s annual fall “Green Week” initiative. The film stresses the need to find ways of living with nature and not simply regarding it as a resource to be exploited.

“We have lost something very precious,” Prince Charles says in the film. “That is an understanding of our interconnectedness with nature and a world beyond the material.”

Harmony highlights individuals who are pioneering new ways to live and prosper in harmony with nature. One of them is Vandana Shiva, world-renowned environmental leader and thinker and director of the India-based Research Foundation on Science, Technology and Ecology.

Among the others featured in *Harmony*: an organic farmer in Louisiana, an engineer who used the model of birds’ wings to invent a super-efficient air conditioning system, and a forest conservation activist in Canada.

As Bhatt said at the Kennedy Center ceremony, “The removal of poverty through fair and sustainable means is the way of the future.”

U.S. Reaches Pakistan Flood Relief Milestone

Washington — U.S. flood relief efforts in Pakistan reached a new milestone on November 21, with more than 25 million pounds of relief supplies delivered in Pakistan since U.S. military relief flight operations began August 5, U.S. Embassy Islamabad said in a press release.

Flooding that began in late July caused 1,800 deaths, affected 21 million people, destroyed thousands of acres of crops and left one-fifth of Pakistan under water at one point. The government of Pakistan requested U.S. military assistance in early August. Since then, the U.S. military, working closely with the Pakistan military, has delivered 25,029,046 pounds (approximately 11.3 million kilograms) of relief supplies and rescued more than 39,000 people in the flood-affected regions by airlifting them to safety.

“I’m extremely proud of our aircrews and support personnel in reaching this milestone — they’ve been working incredibly hard with their Pakistan military counterparts to deliver much-needed food aid and humanitarian supplies to flood victims throughout the country,” Vice Admiral Mike LeFever, U.S. Defense Department representative to Pakistan, said in the embassy release.

The U.S. government is providing more than \$463 million for Pakistan flood relief and recovery efforts, while the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and other U.S. agencies continue to assist victims, in addition to the U.S. military operations.

There are currently 18 U.S. military helicopters and approximately 350 U.S. service members in Pakistan supporting the Pakistan government’s flood relief efforts, the embassy release states.

“With winter approaching, their work is especially appreciated in the difficult-to-reach mountain communities of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province — isolated places like Swat and Kohistan, where our troops are helping to keep food stockpiles up,” LeFever said in the press release.

United States Urges Haitians to Vote in November 28 Election

By MacKenzie C. Babb
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States is urging Haitians to vote in Haiti’s November 28 presidential and legislative elections, says U.S. Ambassador to Haiti Kenneth Merten.

“Given the issues the next president and legislature will have to confront here in Haiti, in terms of providing vision for Haiti’s future and a program for implementing

that vision, we hope to see broad participation across the Haitian population in this important election,” Merten said November 23 in a press briefing from the U.S. Embassy in Port-au-Prince.

Haiti’s new leaders will face the challenge of rebuilding the nation of 10 million citizens that was already the poorest in the Western Hemisphere before a catastrophic earthquake in January flattened much of the capital city and killed 250,000 people.

The country is now battling a cholera epidemic that has killed more than 1,100 people and required at least 18,000 to be hospitalized. The disease has spread quickly through the temporary settlements that house more than 1 million displaced Haitians.

“This has been a difficult year for Haiti, and I think it is important that the political process move forward,” Merten said.

Before election preparations began, Merten said, the United Nations partnered with the Haitian government to determine the feasibility of holding a vote. They examined issues such as how to register new voters, replace lost or destroyed voter cards, ensure sufficient voting centers and determine where displaced citizens may cast ballots.

“They concluded that these elections could take place, and we have supported that process. We have provided \$5 million to the electoral fund administrated by the U.N. Development Programme, and our contribution went towards materials such as paper for ballots and ballot boxes,” Merten said.

He estimated about 250,000 new voters will register to vote, and said Haiti has set up more than 11,000 polling places.

Merten said the country’s national police will be charged with election security, while Haiti’s Conseil Electoral Provisoire (CEP) is responsible for overseeing the electoral process.

“We expect CEP to carry out its duties in fulfillment of Haitian law and with the transparency that befits democracy and that the Haitian people deserve.”

The CEP will be supported by the U.N. Stabilization Mission in Haiti, known by the acronym MINUSTAH, and the Joint Electoral Observation Mission (JOEM), an effort of the Organization of American States and the Caribbean Community. Merten said the groups’ combined efforts will be joined by between 5,000 and 7,000 Haitian electoral observers.

“We believe that these initiatives will increase the accountability and effectiveness of the CEP. ... Between Haitian civil society, the JOEM and other groups, there will be a lot of eyes watching the process and ensuring that it is free, fair and transparent,” Merten said.

Haiti will be electing a new president, replacing René Préval, who cannot run again. Voters will also elect a 99-member lower house and 11 members of the 30-seat Senate in the November 28 election.

South and Central Asia Students Embrace America’s Thanksgiving

By Lauren Monsen
Staff Writer

Washington — Shilpa Surendran of India recently earned a graduate degree from American University and is proud of that accomplishment. But Surendran also takes pride in her status at Thanksgiving dinner, which has moved from curious guest to full participant in meal preparation.

Her introduction to American culture has been gradual. Surendran recalls spending her first Thanksgiving as a student with her American aunt and uncle. Her aunt prepared an Indian dish in addition to traditional American fare. “I didn’t know what a wonderful spread it would be,” she said. “It was a very cozy gathering. We ate and talked.” The following year, Surendran’s Thanksgiving was hosted by a Korean-American friend who did all the cooking.

But at this year’s Thanksgiving, hosted by a friend from Georgia, Surendran will cook. “I’m going to make a cornbread stuffing with jalapenos and sausage,” she said. “I’m really excited to cook this and have something that people can share.”

Surendran’s experience is not unusual among international students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities. Many join classmates, professors or American relatives for Thanksgiving, a U.S. holiday observed on the fourth Thursday in November and traced to a 1621 autumn harvest festival at which pilgrims who settled the New England colonies and Native Americans feasted and gave thanks for surviving the brutal winter. President Abraham Lincoln established Thanksgiving as a national holiday in 1863.

“Thanksgiving is truly the American holiday that celebrates the value of sharing,” said Susan Schneider, a German student at American University in Washington. Ever since her 2006 arrival at the university, Schneider has spent Thanksgiving in Pennsylvania with the family of her friend Prema William, whose parents are first- and second-generation Americans. The family’s roots are in

India, and when guests arrive for Thanksgiving, “the grandma wears a sari,” Schneider said. But the menu is classic Thanksgiving fare: turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie.

In other households, vegetarian and specialty foods are offered as alternatives or supplements to standard Thanksgiving dishes. For Nazran Baba, a Sri Lankan sophomore at American University, Thanksgiving celebrations – hosted by the family of his aunt’s husband – involve a traditional Thanksgiving turkey, as well as a curried turkey prepared in the Sri Lankan manner. The household welcomes guests from all different backgrounds. “Muslims, Christians, Hindus – everyone comes together at Thanksgiving,” Baba said.

When Baba visits his relatives for Thanksgiving, the family produces its annual Thanksgiving journal, with contributions from family members in India, Sri Lanka, Canada and the United States. “Editorship of the journal rotates each year,” he said. “I was editor in 2009. The journal tells what everyone is doing at that time of year, and it’s a great way to stay in touch.”

To make sure no one feels left out, many universities and colleges arrange a special meal for students remaining on campus during Thanksgiving. At Amherst, nearly 100 students will enjoy a free, traditional Thanksgiving dinner catered by a popular local restaurant, said Jessica Mestre of the Dean of Students office, which sponsors the event. Mestre also plans other activities for what is a weeklong break from classes, including a bowling night so students can get to know each other.

Yale University takes a different approach. It matches students with local families who want to share Thanksgiving. Eighty students participate in the program. “A lot of families like to host people from several different countries to make it truly international,” coordinator Amanda Eckler said. “Some try to serve something from the students’ countries” as part of the Thanksgiving meal.

Irina Novikova, a doctoral student from Kazakhstan at American University, observed that Americans typically are “concerned about including people who might not have plans” for the Thanksgiving holiday. She has attended several Thanksgiving celebrations, and “really appreciated being invited,” she said.

Some students said their Thanksgiving experiences made them question their own preconceptions about American life. For example, despite the widespread belief that U.S. families are not especially close-knit, “I have so many American friends who travel very long distances to be with their families” at Thanksgiving, Novikova said.

Thanksgiving is primarily “about spending good times

with family and friends,” she said. “It’s a very warm holiday.” Novikova interrupted her U.S. studies to go back home for more than two years, and while she was away, she “really missed the Thanksgiving celebrations,” she said.

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